



BUSINESS Columnist: Robert Miller

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Robert Miller writes
about people and
events of interest to the
business community
for *The Dallas
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Center's assistance steers nonprofits toward success

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Measured by numbers alone, the Center for Nonprofit Management is one of the top five nonprofit support centers in the country.

But numbers don't always tell the whole story.


The quality of the center's service is also considered unsurpassed nationally, reflecting its unending drive to ensure the highest standards.

"The nonprofit community looks to the Center for Nonprofit Management to do more than talk the talk," said its board chairwoman, Roslyn Dawson Thompson, president and chief executive of Dawson + Murray + Teague.

"We have to walk the walk and have the courage to test ourselves against the highest standards of best practices and to fulfill those practices in everything we do – whether that's done by our best-in-class staff, our volunteers or our board and advisory council.

"That's what it means for us to be 'mission aligned.' "

The demand for accountability in its services continues to grow, says Cynthia Nunn, president of the Center for Nonprofit Management. "Each year, more than 1,300 nonprofits come to the center for services to help them build business skills.

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Cynthia Nunn, president of the Center for Nonprofit Management, says more than 1,300 nonprofits turn to the center each year to help build business skills. The center offers a newsletter, job listings and a Best Practices Guide, among other services.

"The center is the professional development department for nonprofits, and nearly 4,000 individuals have attended training and certification programs to equip them with the knowledge and skills to improve their ability to serve the community."

Ms. Nunn said the center's business and financial planning specialists have helped more than 100 nonprofits develop strategic plans, create fund development strategies and develop their boards of directors.

"For nonprofits looking for information, the center answers about 2,000 information calls annually, and the Web site is a clearinghouse of information including sample forms and policies," she said.

"More than 150,000 people visit the Web site each month, and 3,179 subscribers receive a monthly newsletter talking about developments in nonprofit management and connecting nonprofits to opportunities."

Supporting development

The center also has a job listing service that helped 407 agencies fill 1,255 staff positions last year.

It has also developed a Best Practices Guide that covers all aspects of running a nonprofit.

"To help nonprofits understand how they compare to best practices, an Online Organizational Assessment is tied to these standards and provides a complete report of where the nonprofits' strengths lie and where they can improve," Ms. Nunn said.

A donation from IBM is helping the center launch a mobile technology lab so it can provide software training at clients' sites.

"The center is also supporting leadership development through a nonprofit leadership certificate in partnership with Southern Methodist University and offers Executive Leader's Circles to provide a peer learning and support network," Ms. Nunn said.

"Our sector's leadership is looking to innovation for solutions to some of our market challenges.

"Today we are talking about accountability, earned income ventures, partnerships, strategic restructuring to diversify our revenue sources and building upon our organizational strengths," she said.

"The Meadows Foundation helped the center establish a nonprofit loan fund to provide a source of flexible funding for nonprofit organizations to meet short-term financial needs.

"The loan process both addresses the immediate needs of a borrowing agency and helps develop better financial management skills.

"With the increasing focus on financial accountability and proposed changes in IRS reporting, the center has developed a more extensive financial management training series with the assistance of the Citi Foundation," Ms. Nunn said.

'We can't do it alone'

In the late 1970s, Curtis Meadows began the push for the creation of the Center for Nonprofit

Management.

Mr. Meadows is now of counsel as a national authority in creating foundations with the venerable Thompson & Knight law firm. Back then, he was the chief executive of the Meadows Foundation.

In 1980, the center became a reality.

"The improvements in the quality of our programs, board governance and business processes increased our ability to provide direct care services, which is why we are here and why we do what we do," said Marilyn Serie, executive director of Achievement Center of Texas.

Dallas investor-oilman Bobby Lyle, who chairs the center's advisory council, encourages any agency dedicated to managerial expertise to take advantage of the center's corporate and foundation partnerships.

A majority of the center's financial support comes from foundations, corporations and the United Way because they see the business improvements in nonprofits they work with.

"There are so many things Citi wants to accomplish in the community, and we can't do it alone," said Pat Robbins, Citi's vice president of public affairs.

"The Center for Nonprofit Management is one of our most important partnerships because they help to build the strength of the entire nonprofit community so we can all be more effective."